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HORACE, MONUMENTUM AERE PERENNIUS

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I

And is this all? Can Reason do no more
Than bid me shun the deep and dread the shore?
Sweet Moralist! afloat on life's rough sea,
The Christian has an art unknown to thee:
He holds no parley with unmanly fears;
Where Duty bids he confidently steers,
Faces a thousand dangers at her call,
And, trusting in his God, surmounts them all.

Cowper's reflection upon the ode of the Golden Mean is expressive of a phase of sentiment not impossible to any modern reader of Horace. Horace is a pagan poet, and the system of philosophy most congenial to him is frankly materialistic. Those who have been bred in the Christian faith, or are accustomed to its widespread manifestation in letters, music, painting—in all the forms of civilization—will find it easy to notice, even if they do not really regret, the absence from his pages of certain modes of thought which they have been taught to associate with the spiritual life.

They will miss, first of all, the faith in immortality to which they have been accustomed in nearly all modern literature, whether of primary Christian inspiration or not. The only immortality that Horace takes serious account of is the immortality of fame. Aside from this, the end of man is dust and shadow. He does not, it is true, in the depth of his heart agree with Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius, that

Dust thou art, to dust returnest

is spoken also of the soul: the old Roman instinct for ancestor worship is too strong in him for that; but he acquiesces in their doctrine in so far as shadowy existence in another world inspires in him no pleasing hope.

They will miss in as great degree the faith in the supernatural

which accompanies the Christian hope of happy immortality; and with this those expressions of aspiration toward perfection, of yearning for communion with the divine, of self-abasement in the presence of the perfect, which are so characteristic of Christian thought and Christian poetry. The flights of Horace's Muse rarely take him into the realm of a divine love and providence. His aspirations are for faithfulness in friendship, enduring courage, perfection of patriotism—in short, for ideal *human* relations.

Horace's idealism is not Christian idealism, and is only in a limited way even spiritual idealism. When he prays, it is usually for others than himself, and for temporal blessings only—for Augustus' prosperity at home and in the field, for Maecenas' continued life and happiness, for the weal of the state, for the nurslings of his little flock, for health of body and contentment of heart. His dwelling is not in the secret places of the Most High. Philosophy, not religion, is his refuge and his fortress; in philosophy, not in God, will he trust.

In a word, Horace is materialistic, self-reliant, and self-sufficient. He sees no happy future after this life, is conscious of no divine providence watching over him, is involved in no obligations to the beings of an eternal world; he looks this world and the next, gods and men, square in the face—and expects every other man to do the same. Life and its duties are for him clear-cut. He is no propounder of problems, no searcher after hidden purposes. He lacks almost absolutely the feverish aspiration and unrest which characterize Christian and other humanitarian modes of thought and sentiment, and whose manifestation is one of the marked features of the literature of recent modern times.

The modern reader may miss, too—especially if he is Anglo-Saxon—that stern manner of dealing with one's self, a usual concomitant of Christianity, known as puritanism. With Horace—at least as regards personal vices—the only immorality is abuse. Of mortification of the flesh, of penitence and penance, of asceticism in any form, he knows nothing. He knows as little of the self-humiliation and self-abnegation which have come to be associated with the thought of strong spiritual character. He is undisturbed by any thought of being his brother's keeper, haunted

by no fear of making his brother to offend; he eats the meat that is set before him, with no concern for anything but his own digestion. Sane, frank, unapologetic enjoyment of whatever life has to offer is his avowed principle, and the measure of its sincerity may be estimated from the freedom with which he records his carnal indulgences. We could indeed wish that he had committed to his pages less of what must even in his own lenient time have been in something less than perfect taste on paper, whatever sanction custom gave to the conduct which his words suggest.

Nor is it the Christian only who may entertain a sense of incompleteness in Horace. Any modern moralist or humanitarian, if he is critically disposed, may find ground for dissatisfaction with him. For manifestations of that spirit of unselfish regard for humanity as a whole which belongs more or less to all modern life and letters, he will search in vain. Horace displays no evidence of humanitarian zeal; there is no suggestion of the sociologist in his pages. He expresses regret for no human tyranny save the tyranny of man's own nature over himself; he sympathizes with no slave except the one who is in bonds to his own passion, appetite, and ignorance; the only charity he manifests is charity toward the common failings of the human heart.

Only once or twice does Horace seem to voice the modern note of compassion for the lot of the poor: once, when he calls death the savior of the poor man from his burdens, whether summoned or not summoned—

Hic levare functum
Pauperem laboribus
Vocatus atque non vocatus audit;

and again, in the more unmistakable pathos of the reference to the bleaching bones of the potter's field on the Esquiline, and to the miseries of the crowded slave population of the city who were there laid to rest:

Huc prius angustis eiecta cadavera cellis
Conservus vili portanda locabat in arca;
Hoc miserae plebi stabat commune sepulcrum,
Pantolabo scurrae Nomentanoque nepoti.
Mille pedes in fronte, trecentos cippus in agrum
Hic dabat; heredes monumentum ne sequeretur.

But for scant indications like these, and but for our knowledge of Horace's warmly sympathetic heart as expressed in his relations with his friends, we might suspect him of almost total indifference to the lot of masses. So far as may be judged from specific expression, he concerned himself little with the many-headed beast save to smile at it, to avoid its stupid blunders, and to forgive it with all his heart.

Such are some of the limitations of Horace, as judged from the point of view of modern sentiment. They belong to him mainly, of course, because they belong also to his time and to his people.

Quite apart from moral and spiritual grounds, however, the critic might be pardoned for noticing an intellectual limitation also. The content of Horace's work is so unpretentious, his thought so obvious and so easily assimilated, his philosophy so simple, so unassuming, and so little savoring of the library, that the unsympathizing or unintelligent critic might charge him with being commonplace. He sees what men have always seen. Life is travail, death inevitable; enjoy while you may; take heed not to prejudice pleasure by false interpretation of the nature of enjoyment; look for happiness to the inward man rather than to outward circumstance—there is surely nothing profound about this philosophy, and nothing new. The insufficiency of wealth to produce peace of heart is a truth which has never been without witnesses, from the time of Solomon, and has never been seriously questioned—except in the unconscious questioning of actual human behavior.

What is said of Horace's philosophy may be said also of his other content: his pictures from nature, his miniatures of the life of men, his tributes to friendship, his moral precepts, his homely anecdotes and aphorisms—all belong to the common stock of human experience.

II

There is nevertheless no mystery either in Horace's having ever increased with fresh fame as long as the pontifex ascended the sacred steep of the Capitol with the silent Virgin by his side, or in his having survived the innumerable succession of years and the flight of time—

Annorum series et fuga temporum—

and become favorite with generations of another religious faith, other bloods, and other climes.

In so far as their effect upon Horace as a literary personality is concerned, the limitations we have noticed are more apparent than real. Few will be regretted, and some will prove on closer examination to be undeserving of the name.

It should indeed be no part of the purpose of Horace's interpreter to condone his occasional lapses of taste. The coarseness of a few of the epodes, satires, and odes the poet himself realized in later years, if the purer tone of the epistles and contemporary odes may be taken as a criterion. The deed may be excused on the ground of custom, and the expression of it may be attributable for the most part to a literary immaturity, susceptible, as usual, to false ideas of the real constitution of humor and strength; but the author of the second satire merits the censure of the critic of art, if not of the moralist.

Let the reprimand be conveyed through Howells' measured words in reproof of Chaucer:

The streams of filth flow down through the ages in literature, which sometimes seems little better than an open sewer, and, as I have said, I do not see why the time should not come when the noxious and noisome channels should be stopped; but the base of the mind is bestial, and so far the beast in us has insisted upon having his full say. The worst of lewd literature is that it seems to give a sanction to lewdness in the life, and that inexperience takes this effect for reality: that is the danger and the harm, and I think the fact ought not to be blinked. Compared with the meaner poets the greater are the cleaner, and Chaucer was probably safer than any other English poet of his time, but I am not going to pretend that there are not things in Chaucer which one would be the better for not reading; and so far as these words of mine shall be taken for counsel, I am not willing that they should unqualifiedly praise him. The matter is by no means simple; it is not easy to conceive of a means of purifying the literature of the past without weakening it, and even falsifying it, but it is best to own that it is in all respects just what it is, and not to feign it otherwise.

Yet Horace's lapses are few, and the attitude of his generation may be allowed to mitigate the severity of his condemnation—and the attitude of his race; for the difference between Horace and the puritan is hardly less ethnographical and geographical than chrono-

logical. In the Latin-European literature of today there is matter as vile as the worst in the literature of the ancients, and infinitely more immoral and tasteless than anything in Horace, for the reason that it is produced in the midst of Christian society, and is conscious. With the law came sin.

As a matter of fact, Horace was more virtuous in this respect than his environment. It is with no little satisfaction that we see him take his stand for the purity of the home in the midst of a society which must have come to look upon the institution of marriage in much the manner of the ancient dame in Maupassant's *Jadis* nineteen hundred years later:

La jeune fille, toute pâle, balbutia:

—“Alors les femmes n'avaient pas d'honneur.”

—“Pas d'honneur! parce qu'on aimait, qu'on osait le dire et même s'en vanter? Mais, fillette, si une de nous parmi les plus grandes dames de France était demeurée sans amant, toute la cour en aurait ri. Celles qui voulaient vivre autrement n'avaient qu'à entrer au couvent. Et vous vous imaginez peut-être que vos maris n'aimeront que vous dans toute leur vie. Comme si ça se pouvait, vraiment. Je te dis moi, que le mariage est une chose nécessaire pour que la société vive, mais qu'il n'est pas dans la nature de notre race, entends-tu bien? Il n'y a dans la vie qu'une bonne chose, c'est l'amour.”

As regards the other limitations of Horace, it requires but a turn of the pen to convert depreciation into appreciation. They are indeed not far from being the chief causes of his enduring fame.

I

The sympathizing critic will call Horace not commonplace, but universal. His content is familiar matter of today as well as of his own time. His delightful natural settings are never novel, romantic, or forced: we have seen them all, in experience or in literature, again and again, and they make familiar and intimate appeal. Phidyle is neither ancient nor modern, Latin nor Teuton; she is all of them at once. The exquisite expressions of friendship in the odes to a Virgil, or a Septimius, are applicable to any age or nationality, or any person. The story of the town mouse and country mouse is always old and always new, and

always true. *Mutato nomine de te* may be said of it, and of all Horace's other stories. Their application and appeal are universal.

And so with Horace's philosophy of life. He sums up an attitude toward existence which all men, of whatever nation or time, can easily understand, and which all, at some moment or other, sympathize with. Whether they believe in his philosophy of life or not, whether they put it into practice or not, it is always and everywhere attractive—attractive because founded on clear and sympathetic vision of the joys and sorrows that are the common lot of men, attractive because of its frankness and manly courage, and, above all, attractive because of its object. So long as the one great object of human longing is peace of mind and heart, no philosophy which recognizes it will be without followers. The Christian philosopher is naturally unwilling to adopt the Horatian philosophy *in toto*, but with its *summum bonum*, and with many of its recommendations, he is in perfect accord. Add Christian faith to it, or add it, so far as it is consonant, to Christian faith, and either is enriched.

2

Horace is not only universal, but natural; and he is universal because he is natural. It is not so much paganism that he sums up—for, in so far as religion is concerned, he is hardly less free from paganism than from Christianity itself—as the natural man. He typifies in as great measure as is well possible the purely human living of life: gives complete expression to self-reliance as contrasted with reliance upon the divine.

Whatever the fashion, or whatever the faith, or whatever the ideal of men, it has always been easier for mankind to regulate its conduct on the assumption of mortality than upon that of immortality and inscrutable providence. It is in no small part because the world is never without those who find it easier to comprehend and to live the natural than the supernatural life, the material than the spiritual, that Horace has fulfilled his prophecy: has reared a monument more lasting than bronze, and has winged his tuneful way to the shores of the groaning Bosporus, to the Gaetulian Syrtes, and to the Hyperborean fields, and become favorite with men of every nation:

Iam Daedaleo notior Icaro
 Visam gementis litora Bospori
 Syrtesque Gaetulas canorus
 Ales Hyperboreosque campos.

Me Colchus et qui dissimulat metum
 Marsae cohortis Dacus et ultimi
 Noscent Geloni, me peritus
 Discet Hiber Rhodanique potior.

3

And Horace's summing up of the human side of existence is no mere intellectual summing up. The greatest of all the factors—almost, rather, the sum of all the factors—which have conciliated his audience is that he is not only a complete intellectual summing up of a certain attitude, but an incarnation of it. Aside from his universality, he is also a personality. In spite of the varied nature of his life experience and his literary form, he is one of the most unified and consistent figures in literature. The term “Horatian” visualizes a definite and sympathetic personality.

No poet speaks forth from the page with more directness, or is so well remembered as a flesh and blood acquaintance. No poet establishes so easily and so completely the personal relation with the reader. He is among poets what Thackeray is among novelists. He addresses his odes and *sermones* to a variety of persons, but the illusion is easy—rather, involuntary—that the message is for ourselves. A touch of the imagination, and we substitute ourselves for the person addressed, and feel at first hand the good will and good faith of the poet, the depth and constancy of his friendship, the glow of admiration for the brave deed, the pure heart, and the steadfast purpose, the patient endurance of ill, the delight in men and things, the affection for the simple and the sincere, the charity for human weakness, the mildly ironical mood of the critic who is aware that he himself is not undeserving of the good-humored censure he is passing upon others, the clear vision of the sources of happiness, the reposeful acquiescence, the elusive humor which rarely bursts out in laughter and is yet never far away from it—all the qualities which were Horace. We are taken into his confidence, like old friends. He

describes himself and his ways; he lets us share in his own vision of himself and in his amusement at the bustling and self-deluded world, and subtly and unconsciously conciliates us by making us feel ourselves partakers with him in the criticism of life. There is no better example in literature of personal magnetism.

And he is not *only* personal. He is also sincere and unreserved. Were he otherwise, the delight of intimate acquaintance with him would be impossible. It is the real Horace whom we meet—not a person on the literary stage, with buskins, pallium, and mask. Horace holds the mirror up to himself—rather, not to himself, but to nature in himself. Every side of his personality appears: the artist, and the man; the formalist, and the skeptic; the spectator, and the critic; the gentleman in society, and the son of the collector; the landlord of five hearths, and the poet at court; the stern moralist, and the occasional voluptuary; the vagabond, and the conventionalist. He is independent and unhampered in his expression. He has no exalted social position to maintain, and needs to blush neither for parentage nor companions. His philosophy is not school-made, and the fear of inconsistency never haunts him. His religion requires no subscription to dogma; he does not even take the trouble to define it. Politically, his duties have come to be also his desires: he will accept the favors of the emperor and his ministers if they do not compromise his liberty or his happiness; if they withdraw their gifts, he knows how to do without them, because he has done without them, and knows that happiness has other foundations. He is not one to praise the lot of the common people, himself sated with the fare of the rich; he values peace more than the wealth of the East—

Nec somnum plebis laudo satur atilium, nec
Otia divitiis Arabum liberrima muto.

As to personal indulgence, too, he does not concern himself about our opinion of his character. He is naked and unashamed; culpability lies not in the act, but in its abuse: immoderation is the only vice. He conceals nothing, pretends to nothing, makes no excuses, suffers from no self-consciousness, exercises no reserve in his self-illumination. There are few expressions of self in all

literature so spontaneous and so complete. Horace has left us a portrait of his soul more skilfully rendered by far than that of his person—a portrait duly furnished forth with both shadow and light, naturalistic after the style of the portrait art of the time.

Further, there is a corollary to Horace's frankness regarding himself which constitutes another element in the charm of his personality. His very unreserve postulates an open and a kindly heart. To call him a satirist at all is to necessitate his own special definition of satire: *ridentem dicere verum*. There is in his ripper work, at least, no trace of bitterness. He laughs with some purpose, and to some purpose, but his laughter is never sardonic:

Ridiculum acri

Fortius et melius magnas plerumque secat res.

His sane judgment and generous experience tell him that the foibles of mankind which are so universal are his own as well as theirs, and are not to be changed by so slight a thing as the railing of a satiric tongue with a tang; he reflects that what in himself produces no very disastrous results may with no great danger be forgiven also in them. He will not look on the faults of a friend with the eye of the serpent or the eagle. He would be in agreement with Parsondes, in one of Juan Valera's *Cuentos*: "Needless troubles kill the fool, and no one is more a fool than he who worries himself to censure the vices of others merely because he has had no opportunity of falling into them himself, or else has failed to fall into them from ignorance, bad taste, or rusticity."

4

Add to the unity and charm of Horace's personality the unity and charm of his literary expression. Here again, the term "Horatian" suggests a definite conception.

In the odes, by which it has in all ages been usual to measure the excellence of Horace as a poet, the unity and consistency of his manner have been recognized from the beginning. The brief appreciations of Quintilian and Petronius, the latter of whom was impressed by Horace's *curiosa felicitas*, and the former of whom summed him up: "Insurgit aliquando, et plenus est iucunditatis et gratiae, et variis figuris et verbis felicissime audax"—felicity in

the use of unhackneyed diction and imagery, grace and geniality of both spirit and expression, and sometimes the heights of real poetic inspiration—have formulated a characterization to whose broad strokes the modern critic may add little except by way of elaboration.

It would not be impossible to apply the same appreciation to the literary expression of the satires and epistles also. It is only at first sight that a different Horace seems to appear in them. In spite of the poet's deprecation—

His, ego quae nunc,
Olim quae scripsit Lucilius, eripias si
Tempora certa modosque, et quod prius ordine verbum est
Posterius facias, praeponens ultima primis,
Non, ut si solvas "postquam Discordia taetra
Belli ferratos postis portasque refregit,"
Invenias etiam disiecti membra poetae—

in spite of this, there is abundance of real poetry in the compositions which their author characterizes as *sermoni propiora*. If satire and epistle do not rise to lyric heights, and are not remarkable for felicitous daring, it is because it is not in the nature of satire and epistle to do so; but for *iucunditas* and *gratia*—felicity and grace of their own sort, both in form and content—they are hardly to be surpassed. Let anyone who wishes to be convinced try to imitate their author as he fashions his verses from language in ordinary use, giving words new dignity by means of skilful combination:

Ex noto fictum carmen sequor, ut sibi quivis
Speret idem, sudet multum frustraue labore
Ausus idem: tantum series iuncturaque pollet,
Tantum de medio sumptis accedit honoris.

Universality of content alone will not insure immortality.

Difficile est proprie communia dicere.

The poet must give his work the particular stamp of individual genius. "Look at a tree," says Flaubert, "until it appears to you just as it appears to everyone else. Then look at it until you see what no man has ever seen before!" Perhaps Horace did not see much in the old tree of life that others had not seen before

him; but he saw it in a calmer and clearer and more genuine light than most men have seen it, and he has drawn for us with exceeding skill what he saw.

5

Finally, no little of the charm of Horace resides in the general atmosphere of repose which envelops him. Both as a person and as a poet, he communicates a rare restfulness.

As regards personality, this atmosphere of repose arises from a remarkable equilibrium. Intellectually, physically, temperamentally, Horace seems to have been a person of enviable balance. To mention his name is to call up thought of the Golden Mean. His enthusiastic studies in Greek philosophy resulted in the obtrusion of nothing recondite into his poetry. Whatever the weakness of health he several times alludes to, he gives no sign anywhere of morbidness. His vision is clear and steady and undistorted. There are no contradictions in his philosophy of life; it is thoroughly pagan, thoroughly comprehensible without the invocation of reward or penalty from another world or another life, thoroughly restful because of its being so entirely of this world. There is no suggestion of unsatisfied longing for the unattainable, or of despair at the deficiencies of actual life. Horace's very imperfections from the point of view of the modern moralist or religionist constitute one of his chief attractions. Even those who order their lives by the light of another world, and find their own happiness in the everlasting struggle of Christian idealism, cannot but feel themselves warmed and comforted by his genial pagan equipoise—which, however reprehensible in their eyes in men of another day, is freely forgivable in one who lived before the advent of the law.

As a master of expression also, Horace displays the same equilibrium. The atmosphere of his work is one of quiet and assurance. There is nothing in it that could be called dashing or brilliant, and there is also little that savors of weakness, or carelessness, or uncertainty. There is little forcing, little straining for effect, and there is no vagueness either in sentiment or in execution. Everywhere there breathes the sureness of mature conception and leisurely, deliberate effort. Horace may be lacking in the glow of

spontaneity, but in the measured quality that springs from good taste and from strictness of literary conscience he has few equals.

If we trace to its origin Horace's equilibrium both as a liver of life and as a writer of poetry, we find it in both cases springing from the same source: from unity. The most indispensable of the qualities of all successful life and all great literature belongs also to Horace's life and Horace's poetry. Both are *simplex et unum*. He is an artist of life, and an artist of letters.

Further still, Horace the artist of life and Horace the artist of letters are not only consistent in themselves, but consistent with each other. They blend into a single unity—Horace. To describe Horace the person is to describe Horace the poet. He is sincere not only in the moral sense, in withholding nothing from the gaze of the reader, and pretending nothing, but he is sincere also in the critical sense: his work is in accord with himself, a complete and well-rounded expression of personality.

Unity, the most comprehensive quality of all art, is the most comprehensive quality of Horace's art also. It is the bond which gives their greatest effectiveness to all his other qualities, themselves so pronounced that each of them seems in turn the explanation of his immortality—his richness of personality; his universal and sympathetic content; his directness and sincerity; his reposeful charm of expression. This is what makes him so concrete, and so charged with warmth and life—"the friend of my friends and of so many generations of men."